



ELSAH HISTORY

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ARTISTS IN ELSAH

by Charles Hosmer Jr.

One of the many important functions performed by artists in our society is the task of showing all of us what is really around. They open new views --



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windows on the world. We have been especially fortunate in the village of Elsie to have resident artists interpreting our community for over eighty years, beginning with the American Impressionist painter Frederick Oakes Sylvester.

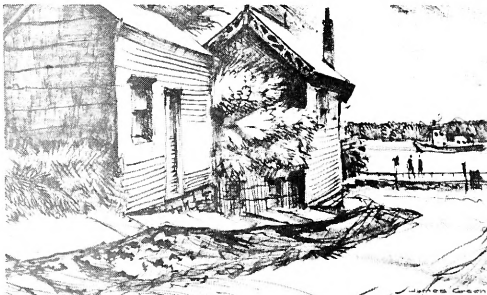
In the space of a few days it is possible to interview five artists who now live and work in Elsie. Four of them have been members of the Principia College Art Department, and Blanche Darnell, the fifth artist, was an art major at Principia. James Green has worked in the Elsie area for forty years, and James Schmidt has been here for thirty years. Glenn Felch and Judy McCreary Felch have studied Elsie for nearly twenty years, both as art students and as college faculty members. Blanche Darnell came to the village thirty-five years ago as a student, but she and her husband Ray have lived in the community for seven years now.

All of the artists interviewed have painted or sketched in either Europe, Asia or other parts of the United States. Several of them regularly visit places that are quite different from Elsie, ranging from the coast of Maine to the valleys of northern California. Even with these experiences, our local artists all love to come back to the village. Jim Schmidt finds the outlines of Elsie are sharper than those of the typical English village. He misses the central church tower that dominates rural communities in Britain, although the cupola of the Bradley house helps to provide a central focus here. Blanche Darnell notices the lush green atmosphere of the Elsie summer when she returns from a visit to California. Judy Felch immediately notices Elsie's miniature scale when she returns from Maine. The village is a small enclosed space where an individual can "cope with things." Jim

Green, who has traveled more than any of the other artists, finds himself increasingly satisfied with the variety of motifs in Elsie. As he sees it, "If you're a painter, you can go anywhere you want to go here in the village." Although Europe is romantic and steeped in historical tradition, Elsie has a warmth and friendliness and an intimate scale that permits individual development for artists.

What have these artists found in Elsie through their experiences as teachers and observers of the village scene? They each have favorite scenes or aspects of the townscape. Jim Green and Glenn Felch tend to be more architectural in their viewpoint. Using an image from Rockport, Massachusetts, Jim finds the corner of Alpa and Mill Streets, looking toward the Lazenby house, to be Elsie's Motif #1. He has always favored the Keller store and the buildings along LaSalle Street as well. His current interest in town is a study of picket fences and chimneys. Glenn also has been a close student of the various architectural details in Elsie buildings that speak of a romantic past. His interest has also included people who seem to symbolize the spirit of the town, but many of those he first knew in the 1960's are no longer here. Walter and Grace Cresswell, along with Lucy McDow, remain in Glenn's memory as a living part of the Elsie that he knew as a student. Glenn Felch agrees with Jim Green that this little town provides "all that a painter needs." There are especially romantic survivals like the Keller barn and the McDow house that still give us a feeling of timelessness without heavy restoration.

In contrast to the architectural approach, Jim Schmidt finds the valley a perfect "curtain" for the scenes he likes to record. Within the confines of the





AN ELSAH ALBUM

SUMMER 1982



Two views of the Mississippi River

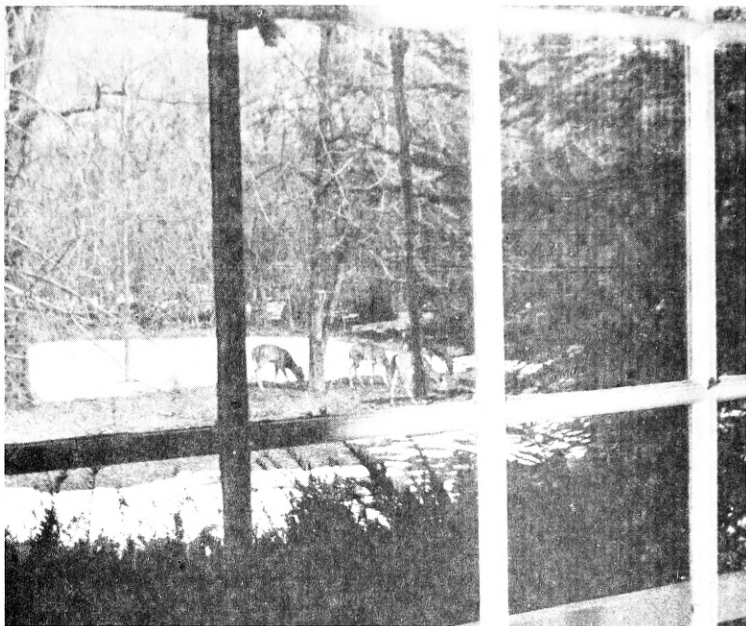


June Cronin



The Delta Queen at the entrance to Eisah

Glenn Felch



Deer feeding

Hannah Haslam



Pickett-play

Donna Burnett

(Note: All the photos on these pages were submitted for the 1982 "Spring Photo Festival."
Nearly 50 photos have been on exhibit in the Historic Elsie Visitors Center and Gallery.)



Two different aspects of Elsay's quietude

Ned Bradley





Rhodes End Antiques (Riverview)

Larry Groce



Elsah fog

Inge Mack



Spire of the Methodist Church

Paul Williams

hollow Elseh has a great variation in heights and sizes of outbuildings. For Jim the views must contain people: children playing near Earl's Cottage, someone running down the front hill on Maple Street, children and adults on the playground next to the old school. Jim Schmidt defines his approach as "slightly cubist," and this view of Elseh permits him to make composite views of buildings in the town.

Judy Felch and Blanche Darnell are most interested in the atmosphere of the village. Judy likes to watch people working in their gardens; she notices the pattern of laundry swinging in the wind. Blanche and Judy share an interest in Elseh gardens, although Judy prefers the more informal vegetable plots. Blanche did a series of Elseh interiors that involved window views of trees and gardens. She has also left another art form in the village through her garden plans. In addition to her own yard at Mill and Maple Streets, Blanche has made substantial contributions to the stone walls and plantings at the Christian Science Church and a number of homes (Felch, Lanigan and Lazenby in particular).

All of the Elseh artists have had to face the inevitability of change in the village scene. Blanche Darnell, as a practicing landscape designer, has contributed to some of these improvements. Glenn Felch yearns for the Elseh of the turn of the century, but he consoles himself with a concentration on the buildings that have experienced a minimum of change. While Blanche enjoys answering the questions posed by visitors who see her working in her garden, art teachers like Jim Schmidt and the Felches find it difficult to conduct demonstration sessions for their students when the afternoon traffic builds up on weekday afternoons and weekends. Each of the artists

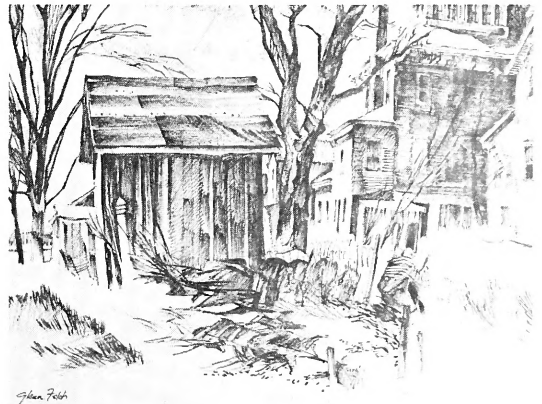
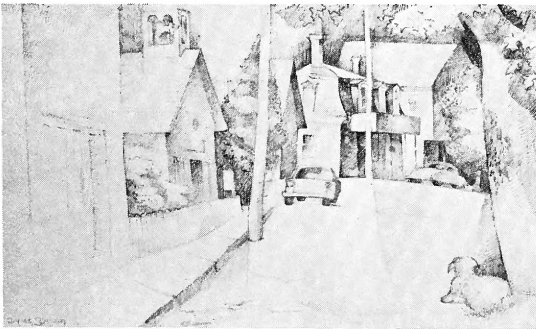
interviewed believed that the village is a perfect laboratory for teaching because of its simplicity, charm and nearness to the Principia campus.

These artists are a very important element in our town because they are sensitive to the aspects of village life that should be treasured. At the same time these perceptive individuals are among the first to realize the importance of wisdom and care in facing the problems of the future. Elseh residents could indeed fail to appreciate the things that have made it unique. The local artists would be saddened to see the town become too "cute" in an effort to re-capture a past that never existed. They would be equally disappointed to see the village serve as a major center for tourism. As we look at the paintings and drawings produced by Elseh artists we should be sure we are listening to the message they are sending us: Treasure what we have.

FOOTNOTE:

Those who have lived in Elseh over the years have noted artists from all over this area and the world setting up their easels and working to capture the essence of this village. It has not been uncommon in recent years for art clubs and societies from St. Louis and as far north as Springfield, Illinois, to spend a day or more unleashing their artistic fervor on the endless subject matter which Elseh offers. One group, under the direction of former St. Louis artist Nikki Botker, used to spend several days in

The drawings pictured below this article are reduced from the prints which Historic Elseh has been offering in exchange for a donation of \$20.00 or more and in specific request for the prints. This offer will expire in this format on January 1, 1983.



the village while staying at the Maple Leaf Cottages.

When asking these folks what it is about Elсах which attracts them, the answers are not unlike those interviewed for this issue. "There's no place like it for charm and quiet." "It reminds me of quaint New England or European villages -- it's almost like someone designed the village just for us!" "There's an honesty about the place, -- one doesn't feel put on about it." "Who can sit here and not feel the lore of the River surrounding them -- it helps my paintings immensely to think that maybe Mark Twain might walk by any minute now." "I can work twelve hours straight in this little village, and leave for home more refreshed than when I work a six-hour day in my office."

We hope artists will continue to enjoy Elсах's beauty and to record their feelings with pencil, paint, and paper. Perhaps it is appropriate to reprint a poem by Elсах's most famous artist, Frederick Ozkas Sylvester. It seems especially poignant as it highlights the quiet known by Sylvester compared to the "quiet" known by today's artists, which includes endless cars and ever-increasing barge traffic. All is relative!

ELSAH



NOW ye the hills of Elсах
That range by the river's side,
Where quaint, old-fashioned
houses
Behind the fir trees hide?

Know ye the vales of Elсах
That run from the water's edge,
With shady pathways leading
Upward to cliff and ledge?

Know ye the life of Elсах,
Elсах asleep by the stream,
With trembling lips that murmur
The World's name in her dream?

Time was--when the years were younger--
That Elсах was half a bride,
And the World, that is ever a bridegroom,
Lingered and sang at her side.

But the song that thrilled her bosom
And the rose that graced her hair
Are things of the past, forgotten
By the singer who placed them there.

CHRISTMAS WALK Thursday-December 16th

This year Historic Elсах is repeating its well received "Christmas Walk" of several years ago. We are sponsoring this walk through Village homes for residents of Elсах -- not just Historic Elсах members.

The walk will be on December 16th from 6:30 to 9:30. A refreshment/entertainment break will convene in the Village Hall at approximately 7:30 p.m.

If you would like to have your home included in this walk, contact Jeri Hosmer (374-2608) who is preparing an orderly plan for the sequence of homes to be open.

There is no charge for the event; rather a solely festive occasion when homes decorated for the holidays reveal Elсах at its yuletide best.

Details of the walk (maps etc.) will be posted and distributed closer to the time.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR
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